

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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SEBASTIAN STROME.

BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

CHAPTER XII. FORFEITS.

MARY DENE took great pleasure and interest in the arrangements for her Christmas party. It was to mark her first official emerging from mourning. All the omens were favourable. She had summoned a dressmaker down from Regent Street to design a new dress for her, and the dress was sent in ample time, and it fitted without a wrinkle; at least, there were no wrinkles except where wrinkles were intended. The Christmas-tree was a superb symmetrical pyramid, twenty feet in height, and its lower branches had a horizontal spread of ten feet. Mary and Aunt Sophia had spent a whole day in fastening the tapers on the boughs, and festooning them with glittering wreaths and coloured bonbons. The tree was placed in the great dining-hall, where its topmost twig, with the little waxen angel poised upon it, failed by many feet to reach the vaulted roof of dark oak. Christmas gifts for the parish children clustered all over the tree, or lay on the ground beneath like fruit over-ripe. Late on the night before Christmas Eve all was finished, ready for the morrow. Mary, half sitting on the arm of a great easy-chair, leaned her head against the carved back and eyed her achievement with weary satisfaction. Her white throat was exposed, with the soft shadow of her chin thrown slantwise across it. She had turned up her sleeves above the elbows; and her right arm—the arm which had smitten and slain the prize bull—lay indolently across her uplifted knee. The round supple wrist and

finely formed hand were turned outwards; the fingers, plump at the beginning and tapering smoothly to the tips, were half relaxed. It was an exquisite hand; but its beauty was not the reason why, sometimes, before falling asleep at night, Mary had kissed it. It was the hand which she would one day give to Sebastian, and therefore it was dear and precious to her.

The disturbance of mind occasioned by the anonymous letter had been dissipated by the constant cheerful employment of the last day or two, and Mary's spirits were now serene and hopeful. Before this time to-morrow night she expected to have been made very happy. It was some weeks since she had seen Sebastian, and this would be the first occasion on which they had met with any degree of publicity. It would be a kind of confirmation of their betrothal; and being on Christmas Eve, and after the little effort of self-denial she had made in consenting (against her intuitive wish) that Sebastian should undertake the charge of Fanny, she was superstitious enough to fancy that everything must turn out well. She was, it is true, a little puzzled at having heard nothing from Sebastian in answer to her note. He might have written; although, to be sure, there was nothing particular for him to write, unless to say that he loved her, and that she was not the less present in his thoughts because he was away from her. But Sebastian was not in the habit of writing such sentimentalities, or even of speaking them; and no doubt they would not be logically a propos of anything she had written to him. In fact she had been rather careful to make her note merely concise and businesslike; there was nothing effusive—no gush in it; and

it was not to be expected that he should know with what secret energy of heart she had penned the words "Dear Sebastian," or signed herself "Your own Mary." But she was happy and hopeful nevertheless.

"If it snows to-morrow I shall send over the carriage for Mr. and Mrs. Strome," she said to Aunt Sophia, who was sitting, in a state of exhaustion, on a low chair at the other side of the tree.

This poor lady had worked almost as hard as her patroness, without, perhaps, quite the same stimulus of zeal, but with a great deal of anxiety and suspense which it was incumbent upon her to hide. She was no less anxious than Miss Dene for news of Sebastian, but had different views as to what that news would be. It would be uncharitable at this moment to withhold from Aunt Sophia our tribute of admiration and compassion: of admiration for her courage in undertaking such a part as she had to play, and of compassion for the inevitable loneliness and lack of sympathy and support with which, among other things, she had to contend. For, after all, what did she stand to win if all the schemes in which she was involved succeeded utterly? An independence of three or four hundred a year, and a loneliness as great as ever, and with nothing pleasant to think about or, worse still, to look forward to; whereas, if the calculations were to miscarry, Aunt Sophia would lose so much that she might as well make a clean sweep of it, and by slightly increasing her evening dose of laudanum—

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded the heiress rather imperiously.

"I thought I had answered you, darling—I beg your pardon; but I have got such a headache! Will you know what time the carriage should be sent? They might be detained, you know, or come earlier than you expected."

"I thought of driving over myself to the Home. Fanny will probably be there to-night, and I shall be expected to see that she is properly attended to."

"I don't think, love, I would go until later. If Fanny has come, won't she want to be let alone for a while, until she can recover herself a little? Seeing you would be sure to agitate her. Wouldn't it be kinder to wait?"

Aunt Sophia had her own reasons for preferring that Mary should stay at home until news came to her; and Mary, not being in any particular hurry to meet Fanny, allowed herself to adopt Aunt

Sophia's advice. The question of sending the carriage was left in abeyance, as depending upon the weather. Mary was not in a disputatious mood on this evening. When, soon afterwards, she went to bed, she knelt down and prayed God to bless Sebastian and herself, and Mr. and Mrs. Strome. And even as she was praying, the minister had fallen forward into his son's arms, and his kind spirit, which had loved so much in this world, was brought face to face with the Divine love concerning which he had faithfully testified.

On the next morning the snow-storm had ceased, the earth was frosty white, and the sky a tender blue. There was still a good deal to be done in the way of preparing the house for the reception of the guests, and inspecting the cook's arrangements for the children's dinner. The programme was that the children, about seventy of whom were invited, should arrive at five o'clock, and immediately sit down to table in the long picture-gallery. Dinner over, they were to repair to the Christmas-tree, and there remain until eight, when a number of covered waggons would be in attendance to carry them back to the village. After they were gone, the reception of the elder guests would begin. A few favoured persons, however (the Stromes, of course, among the rest), were expected beforehand, to help look after the children and distribute the gifts; and as for Sebastian, who must have reached Cedarhurst the previous evening, he was to be looked for any time after breakfast. As Mary moved about her duties, her eyes and ears were constantly on the watch; and more than once the blood warmed in her cheeks and her bosom rose at what she fancied might be his step or voice. But the morning passed away, and the afternoon set in, and still he did not come; and Mary began to resolve that when he did come he should meet with a very cool reception.

Aunt Sophia, meanwhile, was no less on the alert and no less disconcerted than Mary. Not that she expected Sebastian—he was the last person she looked to see—but it had been distinctly arranged between Selim and herself that Prout was to come privately to the Hall betimes in the morning, and report to her upon the progress of affairs. But Prout appeared no more than Sebastian. What did it mean? Had the plot miscarried after all? It was a trying morning for her, the more so that Mary's

temper got shorter and shorter every hour. The longer Aunt Sophia reflected upon the situation, the less intelligible did it appear. Supposing that she and Selim had been mistaken in their suspicions as to Sebastian, why did the latter make no sign? The absence of all news, good or bad, was less easy to bear than the certainty of the worst.

The proverb has it, indeed, that no rumour travels so fast as that of calamity; but experience proves this to be not always the case. Otherwise, Mary Dene would have heard before luncheon-time of the death of the vicar, if not also of the circumstances under which it occurred. But all causes seemed to conspire to keep her in ignorance up to the latest moment. In the first place it was deemed unadvisable to make the news public in the village sooner than was necessary, for Mrs. Strome's sake as well as for other obvious reasons; and secondly, when it was decided to entrust Prout with a letter to the Hall, apprising Mary of the catastrophe, that young man was discovered to be lying in the pantry in a state of coma, brought on by extravagant appeals to old brown sherry. Doctor Stemper next undertook the errand, and got so far as to put the letter which Sebastian had written into his pocket; but in the multiplicity of his cares he speedily forgot all about it, and only came upon it some days later in the process of searching for something else. During the day, however, a report got abroad that something unusual had happened at the Vicarage; but exactly what it was no one could tell. At one time it was suggested that Mr. Sebastian had been brought home dead the previous night; but this was presently discredited by the appearance of the gentleman in question, arm-in-arm with Doctor Stemper, in the village street. It was noticed that he looked rather fatigued, and seemed to notice no one; but he was indisputably alive. Later on something began to be hinted about a mysterious woman; but speculation had not time to get much farther before the starting of the children for Dene Hall; and the children had their heads far too full of the anticipated dinner to think about anything else. In this seemingly flippant manner did destiny play with the ghastly secret; and the evening fell, and the dinner was eaten, and the gifts were distributed, and the waggons were beginning to take in their hilarious freight; and still neither Mary Dene nor Aunt Sophia had received a hint

of what they were most desirous to know. There was something appalling in this silence underlying all the bustle and uproar of the happy children. But Mary Dene was determined to feel anything rather than alarm; she was offended, and upon her mettle; nothing, she thought, could excuse so palpable a slight; and she would show Sebastian Strome, when he did come, that she was better able than he might suppose to do without him—was able, in fact, unless he mended his behaviour very materially, to do without him finally and entirely. In the mean time she walked about her great rooms in her beautiful new dress, looking like a smouldering Juno; and when a tall looking-glass gave her a passing glimpse of how splendidly handsome she was, she was first pleased and then angry, and then her throat ached with unpermissible sobs of self-pity. No; the time for weeping must come later! She had a great deal of another sort of emotion to work off first. Aunt Sophia prudently kept out of the way of those darkening hazel eyes, and nursed her own griefs as much as possible in private.

About eight o'clock several guests arrived—Lady Featherstone and Mrs. Musk-Mandalay among the rest—and were received in the drawing-room. There was a rustling of trains, and a gleaming of necklaces, while both the ladies kissed the stately heiress on the cheek—the Indian lady quite audibly, and Lady Featherstone in an irreproachable French fashion, and not without a swift mental estimate of the cost of her hostess's toilette. Then they swept and rustled themselves into chairs. Mrs. Musk-Mandalay was a portly personage, with a short neck and protruding lips, and considerable freedom of gesticulation: Lady Featherstone was tall, with finely-arched eyebrows which never once moved from their position, and with a small spiral curl in front of each ear, that looked as if it were painted on the skin. Her hands, which never appeared out of gloves, were very long and extraordinarily narrow across the backs. It was said that the late Madame Marigolde used to make her daughter sleep with her hands tightly swathed in linen bandages; but this may have been an exaggeration. At all events, the hand had succeeded in helping its owner to a title, which was probably what Madame Marigolde had desired.

"Never seen Miss Dene looking better—have you, Lady Featherstone?" said Mrs. Musk-Mandalay, in her short-breathed way.

"She'll be stouter than I am when she gets to my age!"

"We hope Miss Dene will develop a rather less ample tournure," replied Lady Featherstone, who seldom used the personal pronoun in the singular.

"Since your views are so opposite, perhaps Miss Dene would find it safest to stay as she is," interposed Aunt Sophia, with her demure smartness.

"And how did the children's party go off?" enquired Lady Featherstone, ignoring the last speaker, of whom she was rather afraid. "Are we the first comers since then?"

"Oh! not quite that, I fancy. I suspect Somebody else has been beforehand with us!" put in Mrs. Musk-Mandalay with archness.

"If you mean Mr. Sebastian Strome, he has not yet arrived," said Mary coldly.

"Is it Mr. Sebastian Strome, then?" enquired Lady Featherstone, in her precise, well-modulated tones. "We had gathered the notion that it was to be Mr. Selim Fawley—but our memory is so defective. The minister's son—yes!"

Mary had not Aunt Sophia's ready tongue, and always found it easier to feel contempt and resentment than to give poignant utterance thereto. But Aunt Sophia was at the moment engaged by two personages of the male sex, and could not come to her assistance. This was not the first time that Lady Featherstone had taken occasion to insinuate her disapproval of so "imprudent" a match, and Mary was desirous of finding a rejoinder which, while couched in sufficiently polite language, should deter her fashionable acquaintance from ever referring to the subject again. But before the proper phrase could suggest itself, the footman announced "Mr. Fawley!" and that gentleman glided in, and quickly approaching the heiress, bent devotedly over her hand. He then turned to the other members of the company with smiling bows.

"You have had a cold drive?" said Mary, in as gracious a tone as she could command. She was irritated beyond measure that Selim should have arrived before Sebastian.

"Thank you; no. I walked over from the station—the night was so fine. I feared to be late, so I walked fast. But I am in time?"

"I do not require punctuality: any time is time enough," said Mary. She did not mean to be uncivil, and Fawley, glancing

narrowly in her face, had the wit to see as much. He continued, therefore, with undiminished confidence.

"I met Strome in London yesterday morning. He was looking rather tired. You shouldn't let him work too hard, Miss Dene. Now you have him down here you should make him stay."

"The more he works the sooner he will be done with it, I suppose," was all that Mary could find to say.

Fawley had now satisfied himself on his first point—that Mary had not as yet heard anything of what must have taken place at the Vicarage; his next object was to find out what had actually occurred there. Accordingly he took the first opportunity to get into the neighbourhood of Aunt Sophia, who, as we may suppose, was more than ready to meet him half way.

"What had Prout to say?" he asked in a low tone, at the same time smiling and nodding as if he were paying his relative a pretty compliment.

"I haven't seen a trace of him," she murmured back, with a caressing grimace.

Fawley's face fell with an emphasis which he was unable wholly to conceal. "Do you mean to say you have heard nothing about—?"

"Nothing, my dear boy. I've been in such a state of mind all day. I supposed, of course, you would be able to explain. Are you sure that she left London at all?"

"I was at the lodgings this morning, and she was gone."

"Take care! Lady Featherstone is looking this way. And Prout went with her?"

"He was to meet her at the station here. He can't have made another mistake after what I said to him. Mary has heard nothing?"

"Evidently not; but Sebastian hasn't come, and she's very much put out about it. He would have been here if something hadn't happened."

"Hang it all! Why didn't you send over and find out?"

"Whom should I send, and whom should I send to? Besides, I've been expecting news every moment. I could only keep quiet and wait."

Here the tête-à-tête was interrupted; but it was plain to both of the interlocutors that it could not have been prolonged to any purpose. Something had gone wrong, so much was certain; but whether the issue of their plans would be thereby crippled, or only modified, remained to be

seen. Meanwhile there was nothing for it but to wait with what patience they might; it being inevitable that the next move must come from the other side. Selim had been invited to remain overnight at the Hall, so he could bide his time, and be ready to act according to whatever course events might take. Pending results, there was plenty of opportunity for him to make himself generally delightful to the company, and he did not fail to improve it. He was the life and soul of the party—sprightly, entertaining, fertile in suggestion. Under his influence the stiffness and chill which had impeded matters at first gradually gave way, and in the course of an hour or two the social machine was in the best running order. Mary Dene herself was among the last to fall in with this better humour on the part of her own guests, but when she did do so it was with an energy almost passionate. The truth was, she needed some outlet for her pent-up anxiety and ire, and found a partial relief in giving herself up to the appearance of excessive gaiety. Aunt Sophia, Selim, and other persons who fancied they knew her well, were taken by surprise at this unusual manifestation. Since her girlhood no one had heard the heiress of Dene Hall laugh so unrestrainedly, or enter into games or conversation with such zest and abandon. She created a fresh impression of herself in all minds, favourable or otherwise, according to circumstances. The younger women, and some of the older ones, criticised her rather severely; nearly all the men were ready to fall down and adore her; and everybody wondered what could have become of Sebastian Strome. As for Selim Fawley, as the evening advanced he was in a fair way to lose his head altogether. Mary, as has been before mentioned, had fallen into a habit, partly mischievous and partly involuntary, of treating him with a kind of fantastic exaggeration of manner, which probably appeared ironical to her, but which bore a different aspect to him. On this evening, therefore, finding himself at close quarters with so much noble loveliness, and the object of seemingly significant attention from her, he presently began to yield to a delicious intoxication. He asked himself, what if she had already begun to repent of her choice of Sebastian! What if his non-appearance were the result simply of a rupture of their relations! What if the issue which he, Selim, had so zealously laboured to bring about had

accomplished itself independently of his agency! Such a thing was not, at all events, impossible; and for this evening a possibility even was enough. In a word, Selim was ready to commit an indiscretion, and given a fair opportunity the readiness would resolve itself into action.

Such opportunities are not waited for, they are made. By-and-by a game of forfeits was proposed, and unanimously accepted. There was a good deal of fun, and a great deal of laughter. Selim was the forfeit master; and at length it came to pass that he must impose a forfeit upon Mary. The sentence was—that she was to go into the conservatory without a light, and there to find and bring to the court the largest and most perfect tea-rosebud in the collection.

Mary set off on her errand blithely enough, and without any particular thought beyond the purpose of the moment. She passed out of the drawing-room and across the hall with a swift step, and with the trace of a laugh still lingering on her cheeks. But when she entered the great empty dining-room, and suddenly felt herself to be alone, she stood quite still, and after a moment fetched a long tremulous sigh, and then pressed her fingers against her warm temples. The light in the chandelier was turned low, and the great yule log upon the hearth was nearly burnt out. There stood the tall Christmas-tree at the upper end of the room, despoiled of all its beauty and brilliancy, and presenting a mournful and devastated aspect. A distant burst of merriment from the drawing-room, in which the sharp laugh of Selim Fawley was audible above the rest, reached her ears, and caused her to move onwards to the door of the conservatory, which stood ajar. She passed in, and gathering her dress before her with one hand, closed the door with the other and turned the key in the lock. While doing this she kept her face towards the conservatory, looking down the leaf-embowered gloom of the central aisle. She now stepped forward again amidst the silent plants, which stooped to brush her bare shoulders and arms, and to breathe their fragrance across her glowing face. The moon was full, and its dim white radiance falling through the glass roof of the conservatory made the shadows seem darker.

She was approaching the seat beneath the plantains, but when within a few paces of it she paused, holding her breath,

while her heart beat painfully. She was not alone! At the farther end of the aisle was indistinctly visible an erect black figure, its face showing ghastly white in the moonlight. After a moment it advanced slowly towards her. All her superstitious terrors thronged in upon her. She believed that she saw a spirit; and when, as it drew near, she recognised the features as those of Sebastian, her dread became only the more benumbing; for the fancy possessed her that he was dead, and that his wraith had come to upbraid her for the anger she had felt against him. She stood staring with dilated eyes until he was quite near; then she mutely stretched out her arms, with the palms of her hands lifted against him, as if to keep him back. He stopped.

"It is you, Mary?" he said, in a low tone.

"Forgive me!" said she, speaking with an indrawing of the breath.

"What is the matter, Mary? Don't you know me?"

"Are you——?" She moved forward a step or two, until her outstretched hands came in contact with his shoulders. Then she grasped both his arms, suddenly and hard, and he could feel the shuddering that pervaded her body. In an instant she uttered a little sobbing moan of love and joy, and slipping her arms round him, drew herself close to him, and kissed him, with low, half hysterical cries. He did not embrace her in turn, but stood with his arms at his sides, looking straight before him, his lips closely pressed together. At first she did not notice this unresponsiveness on his part; but after a while she raised her face and gazed at him enquiringly. Then she retreated from him a little, still maintaining her intent gaze, and slowly interlacing her fingers beneath her chin.

"Why didn't you kiss me, Sebastian?" she said at last.

"I came here to tell you something. There is bad news."

"Bad news! What are bad news to me? I thought you had died, and that your spirit had come to reprove me. But you are alive."

"Yes; I am alive enough."

"And so I was glad; and I was so sorry that I had felt angry with you! What other bad news——?" She broke off, the colour rapidly left her face, and she went on in a higher tone: "You have behaved very strangely. Why did you shame me

before them all? Why were you not here to-night?"

"I am here. Of course you did not expect me to attend your party. To tell the truth, I thought you would have put it off."

"Put it off! For whose convenience, pray?"

Sebastian paused a moment, finding himself confronted with a task which he had not anticipated.

"Dr. Stemer has not been here—left no message or letter?"

"Nothing that I know about," replied Mary, with her head high.

He paused again, and then said, rapidly and heavily: "Then you had not heard that my father is dead?"

Mary slowly put out her right hand, and grasped the leaves of a flowering plant close to which she stood. She moved her lips as if trying to moisten them, and it was several seconds before she attempted to speak, and then what she said was inaudible.

"He died last night," Sebastian continued in the same tone as before.

"Sebastian! There must be some mistake. He cannot be dead! Your father! He sat here in this seat with me only last Wednesday. You will find there has been some—some foolish mistake. You do not know—you have not seen——?"

These sentences were spoken in a dry, faint voice, and when she stopped she cleared her throat huskily.

"There's no mistake: he died while I held him in my arms," Sebastian rejoined, almost brusquely. "I sent word to you only this morning."

"Let us sit down," said Mary, moving to the bench. "No word came to me." She sat motionless for a while, and then added, lifting her arms a little: "Do you think I should be dressed like this if I had known? Poor Mrs. Strome! I cannot cry. It is too much to cry about."

"He seemed not to suffer much pain," remarked Sebastian.

"What was it? You have not told me—how did it happen?"

"It was on the railway, near the brick bridge. He was trying to save Fanny from being run over. The train struck them, and knocked them into the side of the cutting. He did not seem seriously hurt at first, but he was internally injured, and died suddenly, after having brought Fanny to the Vicarage."

"But—I do not understand. Were not you with Fanny?"

"I knew nothing until I got a telegram last evening at my rooms in London. I had been away. I got your note at the same time as the telegram."

"Then it was your father who went for her, after all?"

"No; and it seems to have been some strange accident that brought him where she was at the moment of danger. She was coming on alone."

Mary had made her later enquiries with only a subordinate degree of interest; the great mournful fact of the minister's death having dulled for the moment all feeling for other matters. She now relapsed into silence and wide-eyed abstraction, slowly chafing the back of the hand that rested upon her knee with the palm of the other. She had loved and revered the minister heartily enough; but she had not realised until now how much he was to her, and what a difference in her life the consideration that she would never again see him must make. Sebastian, meanwhile, was in the throes of a nervous anguish entirely foreign to his usual state, and which Mary was far from suspecting. It was not that the excitement and vicissitudes of the past two days had unhinged him, though these no doubt had their effect; but he was in the condition of a man who has made up his mind to a great trial, and who, when he is brought face to face with it, finds it tries his constancy even more than he had anticipated.

All at once Mary looked round at him and said: "Fanny—is she dead too?"

Sebastian folded his arms and clenched his teeth: sweat stood on his forehead. In an unnaturally subdued tone he answered: "She lived several hours—long enough for a child to be born. The child is alive."

"Poor little baby!—poor little orphan! It seems as if it had better have died too."

"It is not an orphan!" said Sebastian, getting out the words with a sense of physical effort that left him weak.

Mary's utter unconsciousness of his struggle was tragic. She gave her head a slight movement of contempt or indifference and said: "It's the same thing—or worse. The wretch who is its father will never care for it or claim it. It is better for the child that he should not."

"Why do you think that?"

"You agree with me, don't you? He would only teach it to be as wicked and worthless as he is."

"Is there no possibility that the child might help him to become less wicked and worthless than he is?"

"Not enough to be worth considering, I should think."

"Well, you may be right. Mary, I came here to ask—to tell you—I came to release you from your engagement."

She turned upon him with only a mild astonishment, fancying she must have misunderstood him. "Release me?—from what engagement?"

"From your engagement to marry me," he said, with laboured distinctness of enunciation.

A dead pause, like the blackness after a midnight flash, ensued upon these words. Then, forcibly grasping his arm above the wrist, she twisted herself round serpent-like to look in his face.

"We not to marry? Sebastian—what has happened?"

Her mouth was so close to him as she said this that he felt her breath. He repeated mechanically and without force:

"We not to marry."

"This is very strange!" she said, laughing, and then drawing her breath hissing between her lips; "very strange, and very sudden!"

"You will not think it strange. You don't know what my life has been. I have been a gambler and—"

"Stop!" she cried imperiously, rising and standing erect. "I won't be humiliated with your reasons! You wish to be free; that is enough!"

"Very well, let it be so," he said, getting to his feet slowly. "But I wish to say that—to save you from what annoyance I can—it should be given out that the dismissal came from you; that the engagement was broken off by you."

"Why?"

"So that you may be saved from the appearance of—"

"No, Sebastian Strome! It is your deed, not mine, and it shall be known as yours! I am no jilt; and I'll never be called such! I had rather be jeered at than be dishonourable!"

"You need be neither, if you will hear what I have to say," he answered doggedly; "and you must hear it later from someone else, if you won't let me speak now."

"Oh, well, speak if you will!" she said, with an inflection of sarcasm, folding her hands as they hung before her. "I should be sorry to refuse you a favour

you consider so important. Will it take long?"

This new mood of hers helped him; she was opposing her weakest side to his strongest. His tone immediately became more assured.

"I have been a gambler for some years," he said, "and I have lived as gamblers do. So far as I'm concerned, the Church has been brought into contempt. I had no belief in religion, and was going to become a clergyman only so as to get influence and power—"

"You have learnt all this by heart to say to me. It is very disgraceful; but I don't see how I am interested in it. These are not your real reasons for doing what you have done. If you are afraid to give them, do let me go away at once!"

"Well, it is a shameful thing to tell in cold blood; I suppose I am afraid; but there's no help for it. When I engaged myself to you I was not in a condition to be engaged to any honourable woman."

"Ah—h!"

"I wish I could spare you this story; but it was the doing that is the mischief. There was a woman—a girl—that I used to meet—"

"Not any one that I know?"

"Yes."

"I cannot hear it!" she exclaimed in a whisper, turning away. But after a moment she turned again and said: "Go on—be quick!"

"It was Fanny Jackson."

Mary Dene felt her heart leap, and then turn sick. She was sensible of a degradation that would cling to her for ever. This was the man whom she had always regarded as being, at least, the soul of honour. Anything else would have been easier to bear than this; but this could not be borne. To do so would have been to put herself even lower than his level. Mary, after a while, slowly turned away, and began to walk back down the aisle, amidst the drooping plants.

Sebastian, thus left without a word of farewell, plucked a large tea-rose bud, and smelled it absently. He was in a self-contemptuous frame of mind that was not habitual to him, and which sometimes breaks down the barrier which ordinarily deters a man from the commission of violent crimes. Murder and suicide are but a step from such moods as this. It was true what Mary had said—he had been speaking a speech that he had got by heart. Endowed with inveterate self-consciousness and a restless

imagination, he had gone through this scene a score of times in his own mind before it actually came to pass; and the phrases that he had fancied himself using recurred involuntarily to his memory, and, as it were, uttered themselves, but with a theatrical emptiness and superficiality which his hearer had not failed to detect, in spite of the sinister significance of the words themselves. Sebastian now saw himself in a position where the strength of his intellect was not only of no service to him, but actually augmented his disgrace; while that spontaneous and unstudied energy of the heart, which he had been used to observe in others with a sense of amused superiority—this he would now have been willing to buy at the cost of all the intellect in the world. But he could not rid himself of his staginess: at this very moment he was rather studying the effect of what he felt than honestly feeling. He was a charlatan of charlatans. He even doubted the genuineness of the emotion which he had experienced when, standing between the dead bodies of his father and of the woman he had ruined, he had placed his infant in his mother's arms. "Nothing has any strength except love," his father had told him. It was true.

"Sebastian, I cannot do without you! I love you more than I am ashamed! Take me!" It was really Mary who spoke these passionate words. She had stolen back unperceived, and now clung to him, full of tears and tender feminine abasement. "I love you—take me!"

"I cannot marry you," he said as soon as he could speak.

"I forgive it all! Sebastian, I will take the baby and be a mother to it. What other life is there for me? Let them sneer at me! I am alone before God and you. I choose to be your wife."

"No! Then I must tell you the rest. I have never cared for you as any honest man should. I wished to marry you, partly because you were rich, and partly to keep you from Fawley. I can't do it now. I'm going away—out of sight!"

This was brutal plain-speaking, but it was brutal rather from uncalculating fear than from intention. Sebastian's face and bearing were those of a man unstrung by sudden terror. But it was a terror which perhaps did him more credit than any degree of ordinary courage would have done. It was because it would have been so easy to yield that he was frightened.

Mary Dene did not seem at first to comprehend his meaning. But after a few moments her breathing appeared to stop ; she took her face from his shoulder and looked at him. Sebastian's eyes fell.

"Then I was not mistaken ! " she said at last, in an odd, musing tone, quite void of emotion. "It was all false from the beginning ! You did not deceive me so much as you thought—I deceived myself ! No : there would not be much use in our marrying now. I must see whether Selim Fawley will have me ! I can hardly be refused twice in one evening—with all my money ! Why are you here ? "

"Good-bye ! "

"I don't know—you can hardly expect me to be cordial. You have ruined me as well as the other. Be careful never to meet me after to-night ; I think I should want to kill you. I am too tired now."

There was a noise as of someone trying the glass door communicating with the dining-room, which Mary had locked on passing through it. She looked in that direction, and then turned back.

"They are waiting for me, you see. I cannot go until you have left me. Since you have never loved me, that should be easy for you. Stop ! give me that rose before you go. Now, good-bye ! "

He left her standing there with the rose in her hand. As he closed the outer door of the conservatory, Selim rattled at the other, impatient for his forfeit.

OFF TO SEA.

"I WOULD be satisfied with nothing but going to sea I told my mother I should certainly run away from my master before my time was out and go to sea."

Thus wrote Master Robinson Crusoe, who, at the period described, had "the salt-water fever very badly." This is how Mr. Thomas Gray, one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Board of Trade, puts it, in speaking of other would-be young sailors, in a small hand-book* of his ; and Mr. Thomas Gray admits that when a patient is suffering so acutely from the marine malady as this poor patient was suffering, there is but one remedy.

There have been thousands of other

English boys, who, since Robinson Crusoe's time, have come across this insidious and infectious salt-water fever, catching it severely, and being actually prostrate with it. Further, there are thousands of other English boys developing into fresh "cases" of the disorder daily ; with whom the hospital-wards for the cure of it (if there were any) might be full to suffocation. And brought into contact with these young invalids, and taking them, obstreperous and even dangerous as a good many of them are, into his kind consideration, it is precisely for them—as well as for the instruction of their nurses and attendants, otherwise their parents and guardians—that Mr. Gray has prepared and published his little book.

Now, says Mr. Gray : "If a boy who will go to sea, and who is fit to go to sea, is thwarted, sulked at, ill-treated, or even treated with indifference, he is likely to become mischievous, is sure to become useless, or he will run away." Let him go, therefore, is the recommendation of this sound and experienced adviser. Take no notice of his avowed wish, at first ; pass it by ; keep the boy at school ; put him to a good trade ; do not make him a clerk (since "clerks are already a drug in the market, and will soon only be worth the wages of a nursery-governess"), but put him in the way of being a skilled workman, and, most likely, the little feverish symptom will subside, and will go, and be heard of no more. If, however, schools and tools (which seem singular curatives, it must be confessed) bring no abatement, the boy must go. Is he fit though, as well as strongly pronounced in will ? Ascertain. "Test his sight by the following simple colours : black, blue, white, red, green, and yellow. If he miscalls one of them, he is unfit." Also, "a light, spindly boy is of no use." "Pluck, size, and weight, are very valuable ; for, in all cases, a strong heavy lad who can pull his weight of beef at the end of a rope is better than another ;" still, "a young, small boy, who has a sound constitution, will do to be bound apprentice ; size, at that, being of not so much importance." The boy, it shall be presumed then, has passed these tests ; it is arranged ; and he is forthwith to go. But "when I say, let him go," declares Mr. Gray, "I do not mean cut him off, turn him out in a huff, or make him 'cut the painter,' as he will learn to say in after life. On the contrary, treat him as a reasonable and intelligent lad, with

* *Going to Sea ; or, Under the Red Ensign : a Plain Guide to Parents, Guardians, and Boys, &c. By Thomas Gray, H.M.C.S., of the Marine Department. London : Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.*

high spirits, with a will of his own, and help him properly. . . . Every decent parent and guardian wishes to see his boy do well, and come back to the fireside after each voyage to 'spin his yarns,' and display his growing powers; therefore, it is necessary that the boy should, at first starting, take away with him on his long absences kindly remembrances of his home, and desires for home associations, cherishing a wish to return to them."

Manifestly, it is impossible for anything to be more properly parental or wholesome. Here is a little bit more, too: "There is no time in the life of a spirited boy when the exercise of judicious kindness will bear such good fruit as when he is about to go to sea." Many parents, however, grieve to the heart at having to consent to their sons becoming sailors. They know a boy must be something; they know that sailors must be made out of boys; yet they are, nearly always, shy of sailor-making. No doubt it is because Jack Ashore is not apt to present himself, to real shore-men, in the most favourable colours. He is given to lounging and lolling and leaning about; and to lounging and lolling and leaning about at unusual hours at both day's ends, and with unusual and unmanageable persistence. He is given, also, to a good deal of childish irresponsibility and unreliability. "Set a sailor in the market to hold gooseberries in a basket; it is all he is fit for," is a saying often remembered by shore-men when they are parents and guardians, and they are looking at their lads, wondering what is the right thing to do for them. Never seeing, or seldom seeing, Jack at home aboard ship, the British parent or guardian is ignorant, mainly, of what a seafaring life entails, and is afraid of sailors' duties because he has little idea of what sailors' duties are. Well, Mr. Gray tackles this side of the business with proper nautical alacrity, and takes all the soundings of it as his vessel goes full sail. A chief note in his log is in respect of alleged sea-hardships. They are the exaggerations of a fond parent, he says, blowing them away with a cheery breeze. "If we except the fisheries," he declares, "hardships are few and far between. In bad weather, or when getting near to port, no doubt a sailor has to exert himself; but, as a rule, apprentices in a good ship . . . have regular rest, regular food (and plenty of it), good time for study, nothing in the shape of intoxicating drinks . . . almost no anxiety; whilst the charms of travel and

of varied scenery are inexhaustible." There is no lack of testimony, either, as to what Mr. Gray would reckon to be "regular food and plenty of it." The scale of provisions required by law appears in his appendix. It consists of a pound of bread every day; of an eighth of an ounce of tea, of half an ounce of coffee, of two ounces of sugar, of three quarts of water, all daily; it consists also of a pound and a half of beef on four days of the week, of a pound and a quarter of pork on the other three; of half a pound of flour every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, of a third of a pint of peas every Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday, of half a pound of rice every Saturday to make up the seven days fairly; and there is beyond this the daily issue of lime and lemon-juice, or other anti-scorbutics served in substitution. The food, too, is to be good, fit, and proper; and in case any member of a crew is suspicious that rules are being evaded, a copy of the agreement is to be accessible, with a five-pound penalty for every omission to show it.

Then what are the dangers of the sea, so much feared for their youngsters by parents and guardians? Mr. Gray is so much convinced of the exaggeration of these, that he expunges the words dangers bodily, and heads his chapter "The Comparative Safety of the Merchant Sea Service," in place of it. He presents figures, too, to justify this apparently-audacious change. In round numbers (Mr. Gray is particular to a unit), there are nearly half a million of British seamen engaged in British ship work, he says, of whom only twelve die in every thousand. Now, fifteen butchers die in every thousand; seventeen tailors die in every thousand; as many as twenty-six inn-keepers die in every thousand; even farmers die fourteen to the thousand; it is only counter-men who drop down to eleven in the thousand, one less than the seaman's twelve; and, surely, parents and guardians may take this as a warrant enough that the sailor is, to use Mr. Gray's words, "as free from personal casualty or premature death as a man employed in many a trade or occupation ashore." The fact, is that factories, workshops, warehouses, offices, worst of all, artisans' lodgings, contain impure air; the lads and men carrying on their avocations in them become weakened, fevered, and otherwise incapacitated; whilst look at, what may be called, the colours on the canvas of a sea-piece, in good comparison!

There is ozone ; there is the open sea ; there is the hearty appetite ; there is the broad and far out-look on to well-nigh illimitable expanse. Storms must get into the picture as well, it is true ; so must wrecks ; so must ill-usage, occasionally, at the hands of some brutal officer in command ; and so must the privations that storms and wrecks bring upon survivors. But voyages are not made up of tempests and hunger and barbarities, any more than the apprentice-life of any lad on shore is made up of the ills and the cruelties that sometimes are inflicted. Parents do not withhold their sons from carpentering because sometimes a carpenter-lad has been aimed at inhumanly with a plane or a hammer, or because sufferings have been endured by members of the craft from a "strike" of another kind ; and this is all that Mr. Gray wishes, by his figures, to have kept firmly in consideration. In mines there are casualties, he reminds his readers ; on railways there are casualties ; with all operatives there is a chance that they may be maimed or killed ; there is nothing more than this, he maintains—in some cases there is not so much as this—in the British merchant service. In support of his position, he gives special instances. In the Inman Line of steamers, from Liverpool to the United States, there were only eleven deaths in five years out of sixty-nine thousand chances ; in the P. and O. Company there were only three deaths in three years (amongst the European members of the crews) ; in the Union Steamship Company there were only four deaths in the same period ; in Donald Currie's ships there was only one ; and so on. And at the end of such a pleasant sum it is no wonder that Mr. Gray should ask : "What employment ashore, or, indeed, what life of idleness or pleasure ashore, can offer such chances ?" or that he should be firm in his assertion that "a man is safer at sea than anywhere else, if he is in a fairly good ship, properly manned, and carefully navigated."

The little volume must now be consulted as to what is a fairly good ship, properly manned, and carefully navigated. It is all set down. It is to be a merchantman, going a long voyage ; it is to be a sailer ; it is to be obtained from a mercantile marine office, and not through a chance advertisement, or by means of the unlicensed agent technically called a "crimp."

Why a merchantman ? Because, in Mr. Gray's language, "the mercantile navy of Great Britain contains the best,

the fastest, and the strongest ships afloat, and the very best of sailors that ever trod a good ship's deck ;" Mr. Gray, besides, being on the subject of sailoring as a trade, for ordinary people, of ordinary means, who have no thought of warfare, but whose sons have yet as much of the spirit of adventure in them as amounts to the savour of the "salt." Next, why a long voyage ? Because "boys are always ill the first month or so, and only know of discomfort in so short a time ;" and because, after a long voyage, boys will "come back almost twice their weight, will not change their minds, and will have discovered the charms of a sea-life." And why a sailor ? Because an apprentice on a steam-ship will "only learn to clean brass-work, or scrub paint-work, or blacken iron-work, which he could learn at home ; whilst at the end of his apprenticeship he will not be accepted for examination as second mate without additional service in a sea-going sailing ship." And why, also, must the right ship be obtained through a mercantile marine office ? Because all such offices are properly accredited by the Board of Trade, and are therefore above suspicion ; because the Board of Trade licenses persons to act in concert with these offices, and will always give information gratis as to whether such a person is licensed, and prosecute, free of expense to the parent or guardian, persons falsely setting themselves forth as being so ; and because, to quote now one of the sections of the Act of Parliament, superintendents of mercantile marine offices are bound to "give to any persons desirous of apprenticing boys to the sea . . . such assistance as is in their power for facilitating the making of such apprenticeships." It is best to add that the fee for such assistance has been fixed by the Board of Trade at five shillings, and that there is no more difficulty in obtaining this assistance than there is in paying the fee. Women can go for it with as much propriety as men, since "there is a private entrance at all large mercantile marine offices for visitors and officers . . . the statements made as to the inconvenience caused to women, in having to mix with seamen there, being absolutely false." It is best to add, too, why there is so much safe-guarding against a crimp, and so much forcible recommendation to apply to the legitimate source. Crimbs will charge Jack from ten to twenty shillings for getting him a ship ; they will recommend the particular Jack who will give the most shillings, not the

particular Jack best up in his duties—a law having the same application over the particular ship marked for recommendation and the particular captain; they will supply Jack with necessaries, such as lodgings, clothing, stores, at the same time that they supply themselves with a grossly large percentage; and by these means they will establish claims on Jack's future earnings in such fashion that Jack will be a long time before he can free himself from being a slave. On the other hand, a mercantile marine office provides a waiting-room, where seamen, officers, and owners may meet face to face, wanting no middleman; or the superintendent of such an office is empowered to provide crews for ships by a certain day without interviewing, getting his men, of course, from the best market, and having the matter in his own hands entirely.

Mr. Gray recommends that a boy, longing to be off to sea, should be bound apprentice. *Robinson Crusoe*, from another side, but for precisely the same reason, sets forth the same idea. "It was my great misfortune," he said, "that in all these adventures I did not ship myself as a sailor. . . . If I had, I should have learnt the duty and office of a fore-mast man, and in time might have qualified myself for a mate or lieutenant, if not for a master." That is the point. The boys who "go as apprentices," says Mr. Gray, "will become officers if they stick to their ship, and turn out to be faithful and good servants." A further recommendation is that apprentices should pay a premium. "In the first place, it makes a boy think something of himself, and this alone is a great point gained. . . . In the next place, the premium is a sort of caution money. All boys are troublesome; but the knowledge that they may, by misconduct, cause the loss of the premium which has been scraped together by a father's anxious industry, or by a widowed mother's strivings and contrivings . . . acts as a powerful means of keeping such a lad straight and steady. In the next place, the premium is always returned in wages, and is a good deal more than returned in other ways." To send an unapprenticed boy to sea as a "rough boy" is cheap undoubtedly, Mr. Gray points out, and in some respects it has its advantages. Such a boy, provided he is well-grown and powerful, and can take his own part, gets wages at once; but he is only a labourer, will only remain a labourer, a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, and it is distinctly not for this

class that *Going to Sea*; or, *Under the Red Ensign* was written. There are boys thirsting to be sailors who belong to a superior class; there are parents belonging to this superior class who wish to know what to do; and these are told that the lads, to begin with, must be about fifteen years of age; must be apprenticed for four years, with a premium of about thirty pounds (to be returned in such wages as five pounds first year, six pounds the second, and then eight pounds and eleven pounds); and that "apprentices are generally berthed amidships, or in a house on deck, either by themselves or with the petty officers." They can ship from various ports, such as London, Aberdeen, Bristol, Dundee, Glasgow, Hull, Leith, North Shields; the terms at these several ports varying slightly, but each one possessing owners generous enough to take apprentices without any premium, though some, under those circumstances, will let the apprentice term pass away without giving any pay at all. Nor must it be forgotten that there are those sailor-boys called "midshipmen," and that there is that newly-invented method of learning to be a sailor by serving on board a training-ship. To teach a merchant midshipman, the charge by owners is perhaps sixty pounds the first voyage, decreasing by ten pounds a voyage till the fourth, when wages may be given, with the title of fourth officer; the lads, meanwhile, "living in a cabin aft with the third officer, dining in the cabin with the captain every Sunday, turn and turn about, and not being called 'small boy' or 'tall boy,' as boys often are, but always addressed by both officers and men as Mr. So-and-so individually;" and to learn sailing on a training-ship, otherwise in a floating college, costs from twenty to fifty pounds a year, according to the ship chosen and to the class of lads received on board. Of such colleges there is no need to give any particulars. They are all to be found in the prospectus of each, the same as the particulars of any land college, educational establishment, or art school are to be found in their several prospectuses, to be obtained on application. It must just be set down though, that on board the Worcester, as an example, off Greenhithe, it is arranged that boys are "exercised in all the duties of a first-class ship; are taught practical seamanship, such as knotting, splicing, reefing, furling, heaving the lead, management of boats, swimming, are practised in

navigation, nautical astronomy, gunnery, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, mechanics, French, steam-engine, marine surveying, freehand drawing, and chart drawing, so that after practical experience at sea they may become thorough masters of their profession."

Up to this point Mr. Gray's text has been given respecting getting a boy for a ship and getting a ship for a boy. When this has been settled, and the boy is taken to the ship chosen, his "kit" with him—which may cost from five pounds to twenty pounds, according to means—and with all "family leave-taking gone through indoors, and only one friend to see the last, with a cheerful face and a cheery word," there remains Mr. Gray's sterling advice to the boys themselves. Bidding parents ask for no favours for their sons, lest they become "Mary Annes," Mr. Gray tells the lads not to be quarrelsome, offensive, or priggish; not to cringe to superiors, only to be respectful; not to bully; not to annoy; not to be content with a mere "Sunday wash," as is the case on board some ships, but to be "clean to the wheel;" not to be unnecessarily familiar with the crew till the right men can be distinguished from the wrong men, as some of them may be rogues out of prison, paupers on the tramp, vagabonds and rascals of all sorts collected by crimps, and sent on board at the last moment as "substitutes." "The exact routine varies in different ships," continues Mr. Gray, "but as a rule you must not go to the chief mate unless you have been sent or referred to him by the second mate; and you must never approach the captain unless you are sent by an officer. When you are spoken to by an officer let your 'Aye, aye, sir,' always be in a cheerful tone, accompanied, if near enough, by a straightforward look into his eyes. Never be ashamed of your religion, whatever it is; never tell a lie; never drink anything stronger than tea or coffee; never leave the ship in a panic, or show the white feather; never swear, or indulge in bad talk; never chew tobacco." Mr. Gray is staunch also in his recommendation to young apprentices to join their ship some days before she is ready for sea. "It is what you ought to do," he says; "and then be attentive to everything, and you will soon find yourself able to lay your hand on any rope in the ship, however dark the night may be; you will find there is a rule for everything, even to coiling

down a rope, and whatever you do wrong you will be sure to hear of it; for instance, if you throw ashes or hot water to windward you will see what will happen. You will be the youngest apprentice; go about all things with a determination to do right, and with a total absence of fear; still, have a fight, if you cannot get on without a fight, only be honourable in it." "The penalties that will come to you on transgression," says Mr. Gray farther, "let me warn you from. They are self-inflicted, mostly. Degradation comes first, and comes from drink. Now you know how you get drunk; you know when; you know where; you know why; I will say no more." Penalties exist, also all self-inflicted. Of these, there is the neglect of look-out; there is the omission of the commonest every-day precautions; there are the failures to attend to duty; there is the obstinate resistance to clean habits in regard to berthing, dress, washing, and so on. The penalty of imprisonment follows; which is also self-inflicted, in the sense that unless the crime be committed, the punishment for it cannot be allotted; and these crimes being desertion, insubordination, mutiny, Mr. Gray is not far wrong in his position. He mentions, also, punishment for actual theft, undoubtedly self-inflicted; and he shows how the most prevalent theft on board ship is broaching cargo, or broaching stores—a crime that has led to many a fire at sea, since crews, who do not see the wickedness of such a robbery, will search for spirits and other luxuries in the hold and elsewhere with naked lights, forgetting that the vapour from a rum cask will soon be alive with flame. Finally, another self-inflicted penalty pointed out is poverty. Earn your wages, Mr. Gray insists, and then keep them; do this, and poverty and you will be miles apart. "When a seaman has received his wages," are Mr. Gray's sensible words, "he should never trust himself outside the mercantile marine office with any of them in his pockets, except just sufficient to pay his fare home." Seamen have been known to leave the pay-table with from forty to seventy pounds in their pockets, and to have parted with the whole in a few hours; they themselves profiting nothing by the heartless waste, since, as Mr. Gray says, "they are drugged too soon even to have a decent spree!" Is not their subsequent penalty of poverty, and shamefacedness, and remorse, self-inflicted? Assuredly; because every pro-

vision has been made to help Jack to take care of his wages, if he will only seize hold of the hand held out to help him. In the first place, there is the allotment note. By this, if a sailor has wife, or father, or mother, or grandfather, or grandmother, or child, grandchild, brother, or sister, depending upon him (or upon whom he can depend), he can allot half his wages to be paid ashore to this person monthly, as they become due; and this is a plan Mr. Gray recommends boys to adopt always. In the next place, there is the money-order; by which all the money can be sent to the safe custody of home in bulk at once; or sent by means of the marine office, at the moment of receiving it, without Jack putting his foot outside the door for any temptation whatever. There is, too, the savings' bank, also effected by the Board of Trade, without any crossing over of street, to post, or counting house, or anywhere. And, lastly, there is in London, for sailors belonging to country-ports, the little Thames steamer called the Midge. "Every seaman coming to the London river knows the Midge," declares Mr. Gray with pleasant philanthropy, "and nine out of ten hail her presence with delight." In command of her is the Board of Trade agent, Captain Pitman, empowered to drive off, or take into custody, any crimp who attempts to board a homeward-bound ship to Jack's prejudice; and, better still, empowered himself to board such homeward-bound ship, and ask if there is any man engaged in her wanting to go home. If there is, "he says to that man: what deductions have to be made from your wages? let me know that. Whereupon the captain of the ship brings up the deduction book which Jack initials, and Jack fills up a form, receives a railway ticket straight out, and money for his cab to the station, with something for food on the way, and the thing is done." Jack's payment at the end of a voyage amounts to something considerable; it is there where this wages question pinches. The temptations to a land workman, of the ordinary sort, against getting his week's earnings home intact on every Saturday, are well known to workmen's wives, to philanthropists, and law administrators; and the temptations to a sea workman, returning with many weeks' wages, can, thereby, be accurately calculated. Four pounds per month is about the pay for petty officers on board sailing-ships; three pounds for able seamen; two pounds ten shillings for ordinary seamen; one pound

for boys; all coming, in reality, to considerably more, since all hands are "found" in board and lodging; and when this is multiplied by twelve, if the voyage has been a twelvemonth's voyage, or by eighteen, if it has been eighteen months, or by twenty-four, if two years, and so on, the sum is a nice prize, whether for crimp or companion, and it is far better for a seaman, exhilarated by a successful return to his native country, to have as little as possible of his cash in his too loose possession.

"Boys," says Mr. Gray, in noble exhortation, and with these admirable words this paper shall conclude, "when you have once placed yourself under the red ensign, let the honour of that red ensign, next to the honour of your mother, your wife, and yourself, be hereafter your particular charge! It can never disgrace you; do you take care never to become unworthy of its shelter."

HONEYSUCKLE.

How fair they were, my darlings twain,
Who walked adown the grassy lane
That sultry August day:
Unconscious of the gracious charm
That floated round them, arm-in-arm
They wandered on their way.

One wore her raven tresses low,
Close-braided o'er a brow of snow,
Like some grand Roman dame:
Hers were those luminous, large eyes,
From whose dark depths strange gleams arise
And break in sudden flame.

Around her sister's gentler face
The brown hair rippled, tender grace
Was in her form and look:
A wild-rose colour on her cheek,
Brown loving eyes, contented, meek,
And clear as summer brook.

I sat beneath a shady tree,
And heard their laughter floating free,
Through idle, happy hours;
I saw them gather by the way
The straggling clusters, sweet and gay,
Of honeysuckle flowers.

I watched them weave their scented spoil,
In eager haste, with playful toil,
And laughter-brimming eyes;
They twined it on my faded brow,
Ah, Heaven! I have that garland now,
A sacred, mournful prize!

Was it because they were my own,
I fancied even their lightest tone
More sweet than other sound?
Was it because I gave them birth,
I thought that nowhere in God's earth
Could fairer things be found?

Was it but doting mother's love?
Or were my darlings fair above
The playmates of their time?
I knew not then, nor now I know,
It is so many years ago,
They scarcely reached their prime.
But this I know, 'twixt them and me
Rolls yet the awful, tideless sea

That parts their world from this :
 And well I know that where they are,
 There is no need of sun or star,
 Nor need of mother's kiss.
 But o'er my honeysuckle wreath,
 My wearied heart will often breathe
 A prayer for those bright bowers,
 Where I may see my daughters stand,
 Each holding for me in her hand,
 Heaven's amaranthine flowers !

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

It has been thought that, in writing his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare, for such information as he needed in regard to Theseus and Hippolyta, had recourse to his favourite Plutarch "done into English" from the French of Amyot by Thomas North in 1579; but, as Mr. Carew Hazlitt has pointed out, the dramatist made very little use of Plutarch in this instance, and for the general notion of the Greek hero and his bride may have simply gone to *The Knight's Tale* of Chaucer, the foundation also of the drama of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: an act and a scene of which are supposed to be Shakespeare's, the rest Fletcher's. Dyce suggests that while composing the burlesque interlude of Pyramus and Thisbe the poet may have turned to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated by Arthur Golding as to the first four books in 1565, a complete edition being published in 1575. This work, dedicated to Robert, Earl of Leicester, became popular, and was reprinted in 1587, 1603, and 1612. The most important personages in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, as all must feel in studying the play, are the fairies. That these acquired new worth and beauty at Shakespeare's hands need hardly be said; but they already existed in numerous tales, legends, and traditions; in what is now called folk-lore; in the verses of Spenser; and in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* of Chaucer. It has been surmised, too, from a passage in *The Marchante's Tale* of the same poet, that Pluto, described as "the king of fairies," and "his wife the queen Proserpina," were "the true progenitors of Oberon and Titania." Before Shakespeare's time, notably in the old French romances, Oberon had figured as the king of the fairies; but the dramatist's authority for the name Titania is not apparent. As Ritson has observed, the fairy queen is not called Titania by any other writer; in his *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare gives her the name of Mab, and Ben Jonson in one of his masques also writes of "Mab, the

Mistress Fairy," and of "fairies attending upon Mab their queen." Drayton, in his *Nymphidia*, probably published after the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, still speaks of the fairy king Oberon, and Mab, his "merry queen." Proserpina is here a distinct personage, and Oberon swears, "By Pluto!" And Randolph, in his fairy play of *Amynatas, or the Impossible Dowry*, 1638, mentions "princely Oberon," and "beauteous Mab, his queen."

The *Midsummer Night's Dream* was first published in 1600, when two quarto editions appeared: the first printed by Thomas Fisher, and sold at his shop at the sign of The White Hart in Fleet Street; the second, judged to be a piratical republication of the first, it may be for the use of the players, printed by James Roberts. The first folio edition was printed from Roberts's quarto; yet Fisher's edition has been held to contain the best readings, and may, therefore, have been taken directly from the author's manuscript. In both quartos the play is described as "sundry times publicly acted by the Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlain his servants." Francis Meres, too, in his *Palladis Tamia*, 1598, enumerates the *Midsummer Night's Dream* as "most excellent for the stage." Certain commentators have urged that the words in Titania's speech in the second act, "Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain," pointed to the tempestuous weather in England of the year 1594; and that particular allusion was contained in the proposal to exhibit before Theseus "some satire keen and critical" touching

The thrice-three muses mourning for the death
 Of learning, late deceased in beggary.

Generally it has been agreed that the play belongs to the earlier period of Shakespeare's genius. Malone places it as early as 1592. This is the first of Shakespeare's plays owning an epilogue.

There is some evidence of the popularity of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* as an acting play in the fact that after the closing of the theatres, Bottom the Weaver formed one of the drolls or farces which Robert Cox was wont to perform stealthily, or with the connivance of the authorities, at the Red Bull, and in country towns at wakes and fairs. A favourite comedian in Charles the First's time, he was compelled for his livelihood to stroll as a mountebank during the Commonwealth. He affected to present exhibitions of rope-dancing, while he really performed his drolls, which were little more than select scenes of

humour from the plays he had probably taken part in when times were more prosperous with him. He contrived, however, certain original interludes specially suited to his own histrionic peculiarities, such as *The Humour of Simpleton*, *The Humour of Hobbinal*, *The Humour of John Swabber*, *The Humour of Bumpkin*, &c. The "incomparable Cox," as he is called by Kirkman, who published a collection of his drolls in 1672—many had been previously printed by Marsh in 1662—deserves to be remembered for his efforts on behalf of the drama during the oppression of the Puritans. He seems, moreover, to have been a very admirable comic actor, a great favourite with his audiences in London and the provinces, and also at the universities.

In 1692 there was produced "at the Queen's Theatre," by which was signified the theatre in Dorset Garden, a play entitled *The Fairy Queen*, "made into an opera from a comedy of Mr. Shakespeare's," as Downes describes it in his *Roscianus Anglicanus*. He dwells upon the superiority of the work, "in ornaments," to the *King Arthur* of Dryden, and *The Prophetess* of Beaumont and Fletcher, which had just before been presented as operas, "especially in cloaths for all the singers and dancers; scenes, machines, and decorations; all most profusely set off and excellently performed; chiefly the vocal and instrumental part composed by Mr. Purcell, and dances by Mr. Priest." He adds that "the court and town were wonderfully satisfied with it; but, the expenses in setting it out being so great, the company got very little by it." The name of the adapter of *The Fairy Queen* has not come down to us, nor can it be said now by whom the characters in the play were represented. But, in the first return to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* after the Restoration, the poet's text was treated with more respect than it obtained on later occasions. Certain scenes and characters are omitted. Hippolyta is altogether dispensed with, and the speeches here and there undergo very capricious tinkering. No revolutionary changes are made, however, if excuses are often sought for the interpolation of scenic splendours, songs, and dances. At the end there is a grand transformation scene, quite after the pattern of modern pantomime. Oberon appears to Theseus, promising to feast alike his eyes and ears. Strains of music are heard, and Juno appears in a

gorgeous car drawn by peacocks, which presently "spread their tails, and fill the middle of the theatre." A change of scene occurs, under cover, perhaps, of the peacocks' tails, and a Chinese garden is exhibited. A Chinese man and woman enter and sing, and their performance is followed by a dance of six monkeys! Certainly a conclusion of this sort was not contemplated by Shakespeare. In an original prologue complaint was made of the beaux of the period who were accustomed to crowd the stage and disturb the representation. A brief epilogue was delivered by Oberon and Titania.

A comic masque called *Pyramus and Thisbe*, consisting of extracts from the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, was produced at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1716. This after-piece was arranged by Richard Leveridge, who announced that he had "made bold to dress out the original in recitative and airs after the present Italian mode." Leveridge was an admired singer, possessed of a firm, deep bass voice; he had successfully taken part in the operas of *Arsinoe*, *Camilla*, *Rosamund*, *Thomyris*, &c., but he had been displeased by the arrival here of the best Italian vocalists. Purcell had composed expressly for him the fine song in Dryden's *Indian Queen*, *Ye twice ten hundred Deities*; and at one time Leveridge estimated his own powers so highly that he offered, for a wager of one hundred guineas, to sing a bass song with any man in England. He acquired fame, too, as a composer of the words and tune of *The Roast Beef of Old England*, and of the music to *Gay's ballad*, *Black-eyed Susan*, and the song of *To you who Live at Home at Ease*; and to him is now ascribed the *Macbeth* music so long supposed to be Matthew Lock's. *Pyramus and Thisbe* was a sort of burlesque of Italian opera. New characters were introduced: *Semibreve*, a composer, and *Crotchet* and *Gamut*, musical amateurs. Shakespeare's clowns duly appeared, yet, strange to say, they were not permitted to take part in the mock tragedy with which the entertainment concludes. Thus Bottom was played by Spiller, Quince by Bullock, and Flute by H. Bullock; yet Leveridge himself personated *Pyramus* and spoke the prologue, while the *Wall*, the *Lion*, *Moonshine*, and *Thisbe* were represented by the actors *Randal*, *Cook*, *Reading*, and *Pack*. *Crotchet* and *Gamut* remark upon the performance after the manner of *Smith* and *Johnson* in *The Rehearsal*, or of *Sneer*

and Dangle in *The Critic*. When the Wall has sung a song, Gamut observes: "This is the most musical partition I ever heard." Pyramus dies singing. Crotchet approves, saying: "I assure you the man died well, like a hero in an Italian opera, to very good time and tune." In 1745, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, a comic opera that probably bore a close resemblance to Leveridge's comic masque, was produced at Covent Garden Theatre, and represented several times. Beard, the well-known singer, appeared as Pyramus; Thisbe was played by Mrs. Lampe, the wife of John Frederick Lampe, who composed the music. A student of music at Helmstadt, Saxony, Lampe had arrived in England about 1725, and obtained employment at the opera-house. Subsequently he had joined Rich at Covent Garden, supplying the music of his pantomimes. He also composed the music of Henry Carey's burlesque operas, *The Dragon of Wantley* and *Margery*, in which, says Hawkins, "he happily ridiculed the extravagances of the modern Italian music and the affected manner of the opera-singers." Lampe also set to music, in a burlesque style exactly suited to the words, Dean Swift's cantata, *The Force of Music and Poetry*. Mrs. Lampe was Isabella, one of the daughters of Mr. Charles Young; with her sister Esther she took part in *The Dragon of Wantley*.

In February, 1755, a new English opera called *The Fairies*, an arrangement of *The Midsummer Night's Dream* in three acts, was produced at Drury Lane Theatre. Garrick has been commonly held responsible for this mutilation of Shakespeare; and if his own hand was not absolutely concerned in the deed, he assuredly approved its perpetration. He wrote and spoke a prologue upon the occasion, and took pains with the children, Master Reinholt, Miss Young, and Master Evans, who personated Oberon, Titania, and Puck. In the advertisement to the published play it was frankly avowed that "many passages of the first merit, and some whole scenes," had been omitted from a fear that "even the best poetry would appear tedious when only supported by recitative." Beard, who had played Pyramus in Lampe's comic opera, now appeared as Theseus; the Italian singers, Signor Curioni and Signora Passerini, undertaking the characters of Lysander and Hermia. The clowns were allowed no part in the performance, and of course little was said of Titania's love for Bottom, Puck simply intimating to Oberon

that his queen was in love with "a patched fool." As Genest notes, "nothing can be more flat." Some two dozen songs were added to the text; the Italians probably singing in their own language. This was of inferior consequence at the time; only a few years before Italian operas had been usually represented partly in Italian and partly in English, according to the nationality of the singers. The Fairies enjoyed a favourable reception and some nine representations. Tate Wilkinson records that the Italian singers were of important service to the interests of the Drury Lane management.

Another version of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was produced at Drury Lane on November 23, 1763. The play was now allowed its legitimate number of acts, but the text underwent considerable alterations; thirty-three songs were introduced, and nearly the whole of the mock tragedy was suppressed. The fairies were still represented by children; Yates appeared as Bottom, Baddeley as Flute, and Parsons as Starveling; Miss Young played Hermia; the Helena was the pretty Mrs. Vincent of whom Churchill wrote in *The Rosciad*:

Lo! Vincent comes—with simple grace arrayed,
She laughs at paltry arts, and scorns parade.
Nature through her is by reflection shown,
Whilst Gay once more knows Polly for his own.

This new edition of the play was performed upon one occasion only, "when the spectators were uncommonly few, and therefore not in the best humour;" respect for Shakespeare, however, it is added, kept them silent. Three days later appeared *A Fairy Tale*, an after-piece in two acts formed out of the wreck of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and received with favour. Theseus and all the serious characters were omitted; little was left, indeed, but the fairies and their songs. George Colman for some time bore the responsibility of these alterations and adaptations; but he was moved at last to declare his innocence in the matter. "It is true," he said, "that I attended the rehearsals of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the express desire of Mr. Garrick, who was going abroad; but the revival failing of success, as I foretold it would fail, the play upon my advice was reduced to two acts under the title of *A Fairy Tale*; so that I was little more than a godfather on the occasion, and the alterations should have been subscribed Anon." The editors of the *Biographia Dramatica* note, however, that they had

seen evidence enough to satisfy them that the first alteration was the work of Garrick. *A Fairy Tale*, a play in two acts, described by Genest as "taken from the Midsummer Night's Dream, with the omission of the ass's head and the burlesque tragedy," was represented at the Haymarket in 1777. This was, no doubt, the *Fairy Tale* of 1763, with its songs and perhaps some restoration of the text. Theseus and the lovers did not appear, but the clowns obtained adequate representation. The characters of Bottom, Quince, and Snug were sustained by the comedians Parsons, Edwin, and Bannister; Miss Morris, Miss Peggy Farren, and Master Edwin personating the fairies Oberon, Titania, and Puck.

The play seems now to have been allowed a long rest. "Not acted fifty years" ran the inscription at the head of the Covent Garden playbill for the 17th January, 1816, announcing the revival of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*; yet another operatic arrangement of the work in three acts, with many songs, new scenery and decorations, and a grand concluding pageant commemorative of the triumphs of Theseus, who in an interpolated speech excused this glorification of himself by pleading the request of Hippolyta:

Next for our pageant
Which but for thy request—but that it's fair
Director is Hippolyta, we willingly ourselves
Would not be witness of; since 'tis to celebrate
Our own poor triumphs.

As Genest notes: "The modern regal style of *We for I* is here most improperly introduced. Shakespeare knew better what was right." Reynolds, the dramatist, was the adapter on this occasion, and mentions in his *Memoirs* that he received from Miller, the bookseller, one hundred pounds for the copyright of his adaptation, with a promise of fifty pounds more upon the fulfilment of certain conditions. Reynolds writes that he almost fancied the while that Shakespeare stood frowning by, muttering: "Why, you modern dramatist, are you not ashamed to get out of my brains more money for one play than I ever gained by five?" The adapter, however, boasted that he had restored to the stage "a lost but divine drama;" and he obtained the applause of those who judged it, better to have the *Midsummer Night's Dream* revived in a mangled state than not revived at all. Reynolds certainly improved upon the edition of 1763, from which he freely borrowed however; but he contented himself with sixteen songs instead of thirty-

two, and he restored many passages of the text, including the mock tragedy, although he transferred this to an earlier period of the story to make way for his pageant at the end, and supposed the clowns to be engaged, not in a complete performance, but in a dressed rehearsal of the play; the rehearsal occurring in a wood, to which the performers carried their stage, costumes, and properties—the wall, lion's skin, and the armour of Pyramus—while Theseus and Philostrate, wrapped in cloaks, stood in the shadow of a clump of trees and watched the proceedings. A somewhat similar course was pursued in *The Fairy Queen*, the adaptation of 1692, and Reynolds may have availed himself of that obsolete work. Reynolds's version of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* enjoyed eighteen representations. The well-known music by Bishop was composed for this occasion. Theseus was played by the tall and handsome Conway; the admired singer Sinclair appeared as Demetrius; Abbott was Lysander; Miss Stephens and Miss Foote were Hermia and Helena; Liston, Emery, Tokely, and Blanchard appeared as Bottom, Quince, Snug, and Snout. The part of Oberon, not usually assigned to a man, was undertaken by Mr. Duraset; Miss S. Booth played Puck, and Mrs. Faucit, Titania. Altogether a strong cast.

Hazlitt has written of this revival, disapproving of it very completely, without, however, applying any special censure to Reynolds because of his alterations and mutilations of the text. In one of his lectures Hazlitt had almost recommended the production of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* upon the stage as a Christmas after-piece, laying stress in a jesting way upon the openings it afforded for pageantry and scenic decoration. "What an opportunity for processions, for the sound of trumpets, and glittering of spears! What a fluttering of urchins' painted wings; what a delightful profusion of gauze clouds and airy spirits floating on them!"

Revising the performance he wrote: "We hope we have not been accessory to murder in recommending a delightful poem to be converted into a dull pantomime; for such is the fate of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*." He pronounced that "all that is fine in the play was lost in the representation; the spirit was evaporated; the genius was fled; but the spectacle was fine. It was that which saved the play." He finds little, indeed, to praise, save Liston's performance of Bottom,

and humorously apostrophises the actor: "Thou didst console us much; thou didst perform a good part well; thou didst top the part of Bottom, the weaver. Thou art a person of exquisite whim and humour; and thou didst hector over thy companions well, and fall down flat before the duke, like other bullies, well; and thou didst sing the song of the Black Ouse well; but, chief, thou didst noddle thy ass's head, which had been put upon thee, well; and didst seem to say, significantly, to thy new attendants—Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard Seed—'Gentlemen, I can present you equally to my friends and to my enemies.'" This was, of course, an allusion to Louis the Eighteenth's speech to his new national guards.

Other of Hazlitt's comments deal with the wider question as to the connection or the collision of poetry and the stage. He holds that they do not agree together, and that any attempt to reconcile them fails not only of effect but of decorum. "The ideal has no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective," he writes; "everything there is in the foreground. That which is merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. Where all is left to the imagination, as is the case in reading, every circumstance, near or remote, has an equal chance of being kept in mind, and tells according to the vivid impression of all that has been suggested. But the imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impressions of the senses. Any offence given to the eye is not to be got rid of by explanation. Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion produced by magic spells; on the stage it is an ass's head, and nothing more—certainly a very strange costume for a gentleman to appear in. Fancy cannot be represented any more than a simile can be painted; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate Wall or Moonshine. Fairies are not incredible; but fairies six feet high are so. Monsters are not shocking if they are seen at a proper distance. When ghosts appear in midday, when apparitions stalk along Cheapside, then may the Midsummer Night's Dream be represented at Covent Garden or at Drury Lane. The boards of a theatre and the regions of fancy are not the same thing." This argument, however, carried to its legitimate conclusion, would permit theatrical exhibitions only of a very practical and literal kind. In conclusion,

Hazlitt admits that Mrs. Faucit played the part of Titania "very well, but for one circumstance—that she is a woman;" adding, "the only glimpse which we caught of the possibility of acting the imaginary scenes properly was from the little girl who dances before the fairies—we do not know her name—which seemed to show that the whole might be carried off in the same manner by a miracle."

The next revival of the play was at Covent Garden, in 1840, under the management of Madame Vestris, when remarkable success attended the representation. The Shakespearian text was respected, if now and then the musical embellishments were supplied more abundantly than the poet had contemplated. No words were sung or spoken, however, that were not Shakespeare's; there was no modifying or transposing of the incidents; and the play was restored to its proper five-act form. The Midsummer Night's Dream, indeed, was now performed in its integrity for the first time since the Puritans closed the theatres. The scenery was of the choicest kind; the costumes were splendid; hosts of children were employed to personate fairies; and special ingenuity was exercised as to the stage illusions and contrivances. A more tasteful and ornate fairy spectacle was never seen upon the stage. The "wood near Athens" was represented in a series of moonlit pictures of a most poetic sort; the "drooping fog, black as Acheron," with which Robin Goodfellow overcasts the scene, was managed with admirable art; and, as the curtain fell, endless processions of elves and sprites, the bearers of flower-like lamps, pervaded the palace of Theseus, literally obedient to Oberon's command:

Through this house give glimmering light
By the dead and drowsy fire;
Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from briar, &c.

The play enjoyed some sixty performances during its first season, and was again represented immediately on the re-opening of the théâtre. Madame Vestris, splendid in golden armour, appeared as Oberon; Hermia and Helena had Mrs. Nisbett and Miss Cooper for their representatives; Harley played Bottom, with Frank Matthews, Keeley, and Meadows as other of the clowns. Miss Rainforth led the singing fairies, and orchestra and chorus were of operatic strength.

Madame Vestris's revival was closely imitated, although on a smaller scale, at

the Princess's Theatre, in April, 1847, when great pains were taken to secure adequacy of representation and the completest of stage appointments. The new scenery by William Beverley, then rising to note as a theatrical artist, was much admired ; a critic of the time particularly notes as a scenic effect never surpassed at any theatre, " the fairy-like transformation from the wood near Athens to Titania's bower and the rising sun. Description," he adds, " can hardly do justice to this admirable work of art." Mendelssohn's famous overture was a work of his youth, first published in 1826, and may have been played at Covent Garden in 1840 ; but now were heard for the first time in England, in connection with the play, the other instrumental pieces, notably the exquisite Scherzo and Wedding March ; the composer's arrangement of the play, pursuant to Tieck's desire, with additional music, having been first performed on the 14th October, 1843, at the new palace at Potsdam, and repeated a few days after at the Berlin Theatre. Theseus was played by Mr. H. Hughes, Egeus by Mr. Ryder ; Miss Sara Flower and Miss A. Romer—afterwards Mrs. W. Brough—appeared as Oberon and Titania ; Mrs. Stirling was an admirable Hermia, Mr. Compton an excellent Bottom, and Miss Polly Marshall a most arch and vivacious Puck.

In 1853 the Midsummer Night's Dream was produced at Sadler's Wells, under the management of Mr. Phelps, who exerted himself to represent in an original manner the character of Bottom, and won great applause by his performance. He was rather grotesque than humorous in the part, and he heightened almost to brutality and repulsiveness the boorishness of Bottom ; something, too, the impersonation suffered from its excessive elaboration and deliberateness ; but it was curiously forcible and impressive, and was well entitled to the recognition it obtained on the score of its novelty and ingenuity. In other respects the performance of the play was admirably complete. Mr. H. Morley, in his *Journal of a London Playgoer*, has commended the beauty of the scenery : " not so remarkable, however, for costliness as for the pure taste in which it and all the stage arrangements have been planned." There was no ordinary scene-shifting, but as in dreams, one scene was made to glide insensibly into another ; while over all the fairy portion of the play a haze was thrown by the

mechanical device of a screen of green gauze placed between the actors and the audience, yet so well spread that its presence could hardly be detected, although its influence was everywhere felt ; " it subdued the flesh and blood of the actors into something more resembling dream figures, incorporating them more completely with the scenes, throwing over all the same green tinge or fairy mist." Miss Cooper, who played Helena with Madame Vestris at Covent Garden, sustained the same part at Sadler's Wells. Puck was excellently represented by a quick-witted, highly-trained little boy—Master F. Artis.

The Midsummer Night's Dream was revived by Mr. Charles Kean at the Princess's in 1856, with all that regard for scenic magnificence and archaeological accuracy for which his management was long so famous. He supported no part in the play, nor was any character in it thought suited to the ability of Mrs. Charles Kean : the representation was adequate, however ; Mr. Ryder appearing as Theseus to the Hippolyta of Miss Murray ; Miss Heath and Miss Button personating Helena and Hermia ; while Miss Fanny Ternan and Miss Charlotte Leclercq played Oberon and Titania, and Mr. Harley, after an interval of a quarter of a century, resumed his old part of Bottom, with Messrs. F. Matthews, Meadows, and Saker as his associate clowns. Puck was entrusted to Miss Ellen Terry, a very merry and pretty little girl of eight. It was felt that the subject scarcely needed the historical and classical research to which Mr. Kean was prone in his revivals of Shakespeare's plays. Admitting that little was known of Greek manners and architecture in the time of Theseus, twelve hundred years before the Christian era, Mr. Kean held himself " unfettered with regard to chronology," and presented in the first scene of the play a view of ancient Athens " as it would have appeared to one of its own inhabitants at the culminating period of its magnificence, at a time when it had attained its greatest splendour in literature and art." On the rising of the curtain there appeared a picture of the famous city, in all its pride and glory as it was in the time of Pericles, viewed from a terrace adjoining the palace of Theseus. On the hill of the Acropolis stood the Parthenon, the Erichtheum, and the statue of Minerva ; beside it the Theatre of Bacchus ; in advance the temple of Jupiter Olympus and the hall of the Museum ; on the right the temple of Theseus. The view also included " the

summit of that memorable eminence from whence the words of sacred truth were first promulgated to the Athenian citizens by apostolic inspiration." For the fairy scenes the skill and ingenuity of artists and mechanists were taxed to the utmost: there were noiseless dances on the moonlit sward, including a shadow dance of Titania and her attendant train, and a fairy ballet round a maypole that rose suddenly from an aloe, and rained down garlands of flowers; the "wood near Athens" was peopled with fairy creatures whose choruses lulled their queen to sleep upon a bank of flowers; pictorial, mechanical, and musical effects and incidents were presented in combination and in quick succession; the stage became an ever varying diorama; the beams of the rising sun glittered upon the leaves, and gradually dispersed the mists gathered about the sleeping lovers of Athens, disclosing guardian fairies grouped round them, watching over their mortal slumbers. Accepting this system of illustrating and adorning Shakespeare, nothing could be more perfect than Mr. Kean's revival. There were not wanting critics, however, and among them may be counted Mr. H. Morley, who maintained that in these and kindred representations the dramatist was subordinated to the dancing-master, poetry sacrificed to the scene-painter and property-maker. However, the public flocked to the Princess's, and encored the maypole ballet. Mr. Kean's revival of the Midsummer Night's Dream enjoyed one hundred and fifty performances.

The play has been repeated since, with much reduced, but with sufficient splendour, during "starring" engagements fulfilled by Mr. Phelps, now at the Queen's, and now at the Gaiety Theatre, when it was thought well that he should reappear as Bottom the Weaver. The latest performance of the Midsummer Night's Dream in London was at the Gaiety Theatre in 1875.

ALONG THE LINKS OF ALNMOUTH.

▲ STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

"ANNICE, child, are you there? Come out, I want you."

"Eh, Mr. Hairkness, ye suld na' come on me that way; an' I canna go oot; indeed I canna."

"Indeed, but you can and must; and why shouldn't I come to see you any way that I can? I'm sure I've been walking up and down in front of your door for the

last hour, like a caged lion or a policeman, so I was obliged at last to try the back. Lucky I did, too, since you were there, my beauty. Annice, you get prettier every day."

"Eh, go away wi' your havers. Don't I know 'tis folly you're talkin'," Annice said, blushing crimson; but as she smiled as she said it, and looked first down with bashfulness and then up with a kind of pleased questioning, it was plain that she did not know it, and was by no means averse to have it mentioned to her. Evan laughed.

"Come here," he said saucily, "and I'll show you whether it's all folly or not;" and as Annice rose from the inverted basket, where she was sitting shelling beans into a shallow earthenware basin, the young man stretched his arms over the low stone wall of the little garden which divided them, and tried to catch hold of her and draw her to him. The fisher lassie was too quick for him, however, and stepped back, her blue eyes sparkling.

"Gae awa' wi' ye. Ye're verra impertinent; an' I wish granny 'd come oot an' see ye."

"Come out yourself, Annice, that's what I want. Your grandmother 'll do afterwards."

"No, Mr. Hairkness, I canna come. I will be peelin' the beans noo for granny to take to the meenister's; an' thin there is the ironin' an' granny's tea. Indeed, an' I'll go within doors if ye'll no go away."

"Will you come out later then if I go away now, Annice; after your tea is over, I mean? I'll be waiting here for you if you will. Say yes, like a dear little girl, do." And Evan put as much entreaty into his handsome face as he could summon up for the occasion. Annice shook her head.

"Ye'll have to go, whaither or no, for I must run in the noo; I hear granny callin' me."

"Promise me then, and I'm off."

"No, Mr. Hairkness, I canna promise; an' I'm no sure that it's richt at a', an' ye'd betther not come. Indeed, I will be glad ef ye don't." And with a sudden touch of earnestness sobering her sweet little face, Annice turned it from him and ran into the cottage, beans and all.

As she did so John Garth entered by the front door. His long shadow, black in the setting sunlight, was thrown right across the yellow sanded floor as she entered; and Annice heard her grandmother's voice saying to him:

"Aye, lad, she's at hoome. Leuk oot i'

the back pairts for her, an' I'm theenkin' ye'll find her."

It was in the girl's heart for the moment to thank Heaven that the fisherman had not been a minute earlier so as to have taken the suggestion; but she came forward quite coolly, save for a little added pinkness in her cheeks, and said :

"Nay, granny, I'm here a'ready. Weel, John, hoo are ye, an' hoo's yer mither?"

The little difference between Mrs. Garth and Annice had never been made up, though it was now nearly a fortnight old, but had rather extended itself, so as to embrace John in its influence. You see he had unfortunately taken it into his head to visit his ladylove on the evening after the little fracas, being himself quite ignorant of it, and had been received in a high-and-mighty fashion which was, perhaps, a trifle more intensified by the remembrance of the soft voice and pretty speeches of that handsome gentleman on the links, than if it had been only due to Mrs. Garth's unlucky interference. This, John, who for all his love was a man of spirit, had resented, and had taken the opportunity for pressing his suit more authoritatively than usual. Annice had snubbed him instantly and decidedly, and with some sharp word about his mother thrown in which had offended the stalwart fisherman, in whose creed "Honour thy father and thy mother" took the highest place; and he had "gone off in a hooft," as Annice expressed it. The little lass cried herself to sleep that night; but none the less she was too proud to go up to the Garths in the morning, and John was too proud to run after her, so they kept away from one another; and though Mrs. Garth, in her anxiety for her son's happiness, had put aside her own dignity so far as to go to the Laidlaws more than once, and had met Annice with all outward kindness and friendliness on both sides, the sore point was carefully avoided, and both women were labouring under a marked constraint, which made the absence of their old loving relations more apparent. The widow was vexed at the girl's conduct to her son; and vexed still more, later on, at a rumour about a smart young gentleman having been seen hanging about the cottage door; and Annice was hurt at John's avoidance of her, and wanted to be entreated. It was a very uncomfortable state of things altogether.

And now here he was, coming in in the old way of an evening, and Annice felt quite angry with herself for the way in

which her cheeks were dyed and her heart jumping at the sight of him. Still she could not help a tiny thrill of gladness that she had negatived Mr. Harkness's invitation, and sent him away. Perhaps John was sorry now for his bearishness, and meant to be "good" again.

It hardly seemed like it. His face was very grave, and his manner rather stern as he shook hands with the two women; and his wilful sweetheart was beginning to feel rather uncomfortable, and to wonder if it was only shyness, or if John were still cross, when he turned to her, and asked her somewhat formally if she would come out and sit on the bench at the cottage door. "Twas a fine evening, and pleasanter talking there, and he'd something to say to her." Annice blushed and put her head on one side, wavering for a moment with a very pretty bird-like coquetry, much like a robin doubtful whether to approach a crumb-scattered window-ledge or fly away from it; but finally shook her sunny curls, not unlike the same bird spreading its wings, and decided in the negative. She had some dough to make for knead-cakes.* Granny always liked knead-cakes for supper; and folks were apt to make remarks if they saw a girl sitting outside the door with a man-visitor, "specially if he were ane as veesited as seldom as Mr. Garth." Besides, she liked the kitchen better.

In her heart the little flirt guessed that he had come to put his fate in her hands for the hundredth time, and would rather have preferred that the submission and her acceptance of it—if she did accept, but she had not quite made up her mind about that—should have been consummated in the comparative privacy of the pleasant summer sunset with only the dark blue sea, and the grassy links, and the saffron glow of a cloudless sky for witnesses; but suppose Mr. Harkness were still lingering near, or were to pass by and see her! She had seen him several times since that first meeting; had come across him when out on errands with a frequency which even the little puss herself felt could not be attributed to simple accident; and had exchanged many a pleasant word with him as he passed the cottage-door on his way to the sea, from the little grey stone, red-roofed townlet above. It was an acquaintance which both flattered and excited the

* A kind of griddle-cake peculiar to Northumberland.

maiden ; for, grand gentleman as he was, with slim white hands, near which hers looked as brown as any berry, he always seemed anxious to meet and sorry to leave her, paid her the prettiest compliments in a saucy winning way ; even taking those little brown hands in his white fingers and kissing them, saying they were sweeter than any duchess's to him ; and treating her altogether "just like any lady," Annice said (though, indeed, what did the child know of how ladies are treated ?). She had a feeling, however, that all this would be altered if he once saw her sitting with a common fisherman lover ; she who, he had once told her, was so superior to her neighbours, that she looked like a garden flower flung among a bed of nettles when near them. But how black John looked at her refusal !

"Aye," he said dryly, "I'm no sae frequent a veeisitor as some ithers, folks say ; an' I'm glaid ye're sae keerful aboot what they do say. Ye'll be growin' prudent, Annice lass ; but indeed I was only minded to talk to ye oot o' doors because I'd some'at to say that I doot ye'd no care for yer gran'mither to hear."

"Indeed, why ?" said Annice wilfully, for the tone displeased her. "Eh, lad, there's naught ye or any man cud say to me I'd care for granny hearing. Set ye doon an' say't, whate'er it be."

But she had forgotten that granny had only been waiting for the beans to take them up to the vicarage ; and, indeed, the old woman was already tying an ancient black silk hood over her white head, and making ready to depart, good-naturedly confident that the young people would be just as well content in her absence.

"Ye maun stay to sooper, John, an' Annice 'll make ye some knead-cakes. I'll no be gaun long," she said cheerily ; but John only looked rather wistfully at Annice as if waiting for her to endorse the invitation ; and that young woman did nothing of the sort. Perhaps she did not hear, for she had carried a basin of flour to the table, and was working milk and butter into it as busily as if no one was present. After a minute or two, however, she looked up and asked rather flippantly :

"Weel, John, what's your woorderful sayin' ? Oot wi'. Gran'mother's fare eneuch the noo, isn't she ?"

"I'm no sure, though, that it's any use sayin' it," the big man answered slowly. "Whiles I thocht it wuld be ; aye, even sae late's the noo whin I came doon here ; but ye're changet in the last weeks, Annice,

an' ye dinna care fur what I say. Maybe 'twould ha' been better ef the mither had come i'stead."

"Aye, we a' ken ye prefair speakin' yer mind thro' yer mither, John ; an' weel she does it too, an' cracks ye oop eneuch to satisfy yersel'!" retorted Annice, flushing rosy red on the instant, and driving her little brown fist down into the yellow basin with such energy as to send a small cloud of flour flying over the table, and even sprinkle John's rough blue guernsey. He looked up at her pained and wondering, and utterly ignorant of how his allusion to his mother could have stung her.

"Eh, lass, ye are changet ! Time was ye wuld as sune have taken the birdie's singin' in ill pairt as my auld mither's wairds. What will she ha' ever said to anger ye ?"

But this Annice was not prepared to say. Perhaps the cause for anger dwindled into somewhat trifling proportions before the downright question ; so she only worked away at her dough and answered lightly :

"Eh, John, ye leuk too sairously on things. Angeret ! What would I be angeret aboot ? An' ye were goin' to talk aboot the folks here. Say on."

"Weel then, Annice, 'tis juist this : folks are talkin' o' you ; an' gin I canna kill them for 't (as I was minded to do whin I haird the firrst wairds on't), I thocht I'd coom an' speak to ye yersel' ; for I kenned weel ye were ower eenocent to gie sae much 's a thocht to 't out o' yer own heid."

It was an awkward beginning, and he glanced nervously at the girl as he spoke, but her face was turned away, and he could not see the sudden flame of scarlet in it or the indignant tremble of the lips as suddenly pressed together. He thought she was not attending, and went on rather more sharply :

"Ye see, Annice, a' the world knows it's no weel for a decent lass to be seen hingin' aboot wi' gentry ; an' they say there's a yoong gent frae London who's loogin' at the Duke's Arms, an' that he's aye to be met wi' aboot your gran'mither's door ; an' even my mither has haird tell on't, an' sair vexet she is ; no that she theenks ye'd have ought to say to the like o' sic trash—an', indeed, I dinna' believe mysel' that ye've ever said a word more than ye cud help to 'm ; an' I'd like to break the heid o' any man as daured heent the revairse—but 'tis no richt for honest men's wives to be sae much as wheespered aboot ; an' as

the mither says ye dinna care to listen to her the noo, I thocht 'twould be more straightforward to speak oot t' ye mysel'. Ye ken weel, lassie, I luik on ye as a' the same as my wife a'ready, an' by-an'-by—" But there the poor fellow was stopped, and prevented from blundering on any further. That last assertion had been too much for the temper of the impulsive girl, whose spirit had been quivering for the last five minutes between shame, and pride, and hot anger, and wounded feeling. So he had only come to lecture, and not to woo, after all; and in such a tone of security too!

"A' the same as your wife!" she repeated, breaking in on him with a sharp, mocking accent, which made the honest fisherman stare. "'Deed, an' I theenck ye make ouser sure o' that, John Garth. Hoo d'ye ken that I dinna prefair 'gentry traish,' as ye make bold to ca' them, to yersel', for a' sae high as ye rate yer ain meerits? I'll tell ye ae thing in answer to a' ye've said: no gentleman ever daured say to me what ye've daured the day; an' gin ye're dune noo I'll jest ask ye to step oot the door, an' ne'er come near 't again. Tell your mither that ef Annice Laidlaw is no fit to be an honest man's wife wi'oot teachin' she'll no win to be 't for fear o' what folks say, or you either." With which, and feeling that in another minute she would burst out crying, and so disgrace herself for ever, Annice just pointed a fierce and floury finger at the open door and fled herself into the back regions, where she flung herself down on a heap of wood, and burying her face in her apron, gave way to a hearty flood of tears.

She had hidden it there to deaden the sound of her sobbing, in case John should disobey, and linger in the precincts from which she had bid him depart, or perhaps even take courage to follow her; but the foolish fellow took her at her word and went; and so it was another hand that by-and-by touched her hair, and another voice, far more polished and musical than John's, that said:

"Annice crying! My pretty child, what is the matter? Has anyone ill-treated you?"

If ever Evan Harkness came to a woman's house in an ill hour for her it was then. Annice sprang to her feet in an instant, brushing away her tears, and

trying hard to make believe that she had not been crying, even while she stammered out something about being lonesome when granny was away, and implored the gentleman to depart.

"For ye ken, sir, this is no the place for you," she added eagerly, "an' granny wuld na like at a' to fin' you here wi' me."

Evan laughed lightly.

"But, my dear girl, isn't it rather hard to own you're lonely, and yet expect me to go away and leave you so? What do you suppose I care for granny's anger in comparison with one tear from those pretty blue eyes? But I'll go this minute, for all that, if you'll go with me. Do, Annice; I came to fetch you as I promised, and upon my soul I'll not go away alone. 'Tis the loveliest evening in the world for a stroll, so just wash the flour off those dear little hands and come. Do you think I won't take as good care of you as granny, or that great hulking fisherman I met coming away from your house just now? I hope the lout is not your sweetheart—eh, Annice?"

Annice blushed up to the eyes and said "No;" though some wilful spirit caused her to add: "He's no sie a lout either." After all, both were true. John was no sweetheart of hers now, for hadn't she sent him away herself; and it was better to go for a stroll with Mr. Harkness than for granny to find him in the cottage on her return. Let folks talk if they liked! She didn't care. It wasn't every girl that handsome young gentleman would care to walk with; and she supposed he did care for her. He wouldn't say such pretty things about her eyes and hands otherwise. Besides, it would be a good lesson to John not to be so presumptuous next time he went a courting.

She hesitated a little longer, dusting the flour from her fingers and looking up and down, then suddenly untied her apron and agreed.

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